Natalia F. ALIEVA

MORPHEMES IN CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN CHAM:

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ALTERNATIONS

The trend towards monosyllabism has been a common tendency of language evolution in the East and Southeast parts of the Asian continent for a long time. This tendency shows its effect here in languages of different genealogy. The Chamic languages, according to the common opinion of the present-day scholars, belong to the Austronesian family. They are Cham, Radeh, Jarai, Roglai, Chru, Bih, Hroi, and possibly this list is to be enlarged with one more idiom spoken by a moslem group on the island of Hainan. Field materials of it were collected by Zheng Yiqing (1981, 1983, 1986) who compared this idiom with the Radeh language. A. G. Haudricourt in his phonological analysis (1984) speaks about a Cham language on Hainan.

These languages, both taken as a whole group and each of them separately, demonstrate some fundamental features of monosyllabic analytical type, such as: (a) monosyllabic morpheme ("morpheme" in L. Bloomfield's conception); (b) the use of word-combination - not affixation - for the purposes of derivation; (c) the use of lexical devices for the expression of grammatical meanings in sentence; (d) complete isolation in syntax. The presence of these features indicates that the Chamic languages have undergone considerable changes in comparison with the proto-language of the Western Austronesian branch of the family (PWAN). We know from the existing reconstructions that the PWAN was characterised by a very high percentage of disyllabic root morphemes (though rather large quantity of monosyllables is reconstructed for PAN) (Brandstetter 1910, Dyen 1971:47-48). Considering E. Lee's statement that in his reconstructed proto-Chamic vocabulary the number of disyllables was slightly more than half of the whole number of morphemes (Lee 1966:76), which is considerably lower than the PAN rate, we may conclude that even the proto-language of the Chamic group was affected by the process of monosyllabization. This process, probably, went afterwards with different intensity in each language, enlarging in them the share of monosyllables.

The Cham language stands out among the other languages of the group not only because it has proceeded further by this way, but also because the process of conversion of disyllables into monosyllables here seems to be finished and simultaneously still going on: beside the already moulded monosyllabic morphemic forms their underlying disyllabic forms continue to exist and to interchange constantly with them, both forms acting in sentence as plain words. It should be noted that the existence of two forms of phonemic exponents of Cham morphemes is perfectly different from that of one-syllable and two-syllable forms of a word in many isolating languages where two syllables are two morphemes.